

Venn, Henry, ed.

misc.

**RULES**  
 FOR  
 REDUCING UNWRITTEN LANGUAGES  
 TO  
 ALPHABETICAL WRITING IN ROMAN CHARACTERS.  
 WITH REFERENCE ESPECIALLY TO THE  
 LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN AFRICA.

1. THE want of a standard system of orthography has been experienced by all persons engaged in the study of unwritten languages. Each Translator having to choose his own system, it has not unfrequently happened that two or more persons engaged upon the same language have adopted different systems. This has prevented, in a great measure, the mutual assistance which the parties might have rendered to each other; and has retarded the formation of Primers and educational works, and the translation of the Holy Scriptures.

2. To obviate these difficulties, several of the Missionary Societies, whose Missionaries are engaged in Vernacular Translations of African languages, have proposed the adoption of a common system of orthography; to be regarded as a standard system, and to be employed, as far as possible, in all works printed under their sanction. If in any particular case deviations from the system be thought necessary by the Translators, it is proposed that such deviations should be referred home before their adoption in printed works.

3. The proposed system coincides in its main particulars with those which have hitherto been adopted by the Translators of African languages. It has not been attempted to form a perfect phonetic system, but one which practical experience suggests as the most expedient under all the circumstances of the case.

## VOWELS.

4. Let the five vowels *a, e, i, o, u*, represent the sounds usually termed Italian as heard in the words—

	ENGLISH.	GERMAN.
<i>a.</i>	<i>Bath, bat.</i>	<i>Vater, hand.</i>
<i>e.</i>	<i>Prey, bait, bet.</i>	<i>Stets.</i>
<i>i.</i>	<i>Ravine, beat, bit.</i>	<i>Lieben, Sinn.</i>
<i>o.</i>	<i>Home, boat.</i>	<i>Honig.</i>
<i>u.</i>	<i>Boot, full.</i>	<i>Hut.</i>

5. It will be seen from the examples given above that the same letter represents slight modifications of each sound, such as are called full or long sounds, and short or stopped sounds. Each vowel sound may also be subject to slight variations, from accent, and from connexion with particular consonants. The letter *r* especially confuses the vowel sound which precedes it in the same syllable.

6. Besides these five vowel sounds there are three intermediate simple sounds, which, in some African languages, require distinct letters; and which may be represented by

*a* An obscure sound between *a* and *u*, as heard in the English *but, sun*.

*e* A sound between the sounds of *bat* and *bait* (English). It is hardly distinguishable by an English ear from the latter sound.

It may be best represented by the English *aye?* when used to ask a question. In Germany it is well known as the sound of the letter *ä*, *Väter*.



6. A sound between *a* and *o*, as heard in the English words *law*, *water*, *bought*, *not*. It is represented in the Swedish language by *å*.

7. These vowel sounds may be conveniently arranged in the following order—

<i>i</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>ē</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ā</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>u</i>
<i>beat</i>	<i>bait</i>		<i>bath</i>	<i>but</i>	<i>bought</i>	<i>boat</i>	<i>boot</i>
<i>bit</i>	<i>bet</i>		<i>bat</i>				

It has been discovered that the same succession of vowel sounds arises from the gradual *lengthening* of a musical pipe of a particular construction.

8. There are two other simple vowel sounds, not included in this Scale, which do not occur in the English language, but are found in some African languages, *viz.*

(1.) The German *ü*, *Gute*; French, *une*.

(2.) The German *ö*, *König*; French, *peu*.

For these vowels the signs *u* and *o* may be respectively adopted.

9. Some vowel sounds are so indistinct that it is often very difficult to decide by what vowel they should be represented, and recourse must be had to etymology, or to instances in which the sound occurs under accent, or to analogy, for ascertaining the right vowel.

10. An apparent vowel sound sometimes accidentally arises from an imperfect attempt to combine two consonants, as in the pronunciation of the English word *elm*, often sounded *el-um*.

#### DIPHTHONGS.

11. Diphthongal sounds are formed by the combination of any two of the foregoing vowel sounds. They may be

best ascertained, and tested, by first pronouncing each vowel distinctly and separately, and then making them gradually coalesce.

Thus, *a—i* :—(Eng.) *Ah—ee*, *ai* :—which forms the sound of the English *i* in *ride*, *mile*.

*a—u*, *au* :—forms the sound of the English *ow* in *now*.

*o—i*, *oi*, as in *voice*.

13. When two vowels standing together are to be sounded distinctly and separately, let the usual mark of diæresis be employed; as, *ai*, *ai̇*.

14. It has been attempted, in some translations, to express the slighter modifications of the vowel sounds by accents or other diacritical marks; but if perfect accuracy be aimed at, these marks will be multiplied to an indefinite extent; for it must be remembered that vowel sounds are not fixed and definite sounds, but that they gradually glide into each other. Besides which, diacritical marks should be avoided as far as possible, on account of their great practical inconvenience in printing and writing. They may be admitted into Vocabularies and Pronouncing Dictionaries, but not into books for the use of the Natives,—who will not need them when they have once learned to read. The same remarks apply to the division of syllables.

15. An exception must, however, be made when it is necessary to avoid ambiguity in the case of words spelt alike, but differing in signification according to quantity, or accent, or tone. In such cases diacritical marks may be necessary, or some other expedient in the spelling of the word may be adopted as a distinction. Yet it must be remembered that such ambiguities may often be allowed to remain without inconvenience, the sense and position deciding the signifi-

cation; as in the English words *read* (verb active), *read* (participle), *nōtable*, *nōtable*, &c. &c.

#### CONSONANTS.

16. Give the usual sounds to

*b, d, f, h, k, l, m, n, p, r, t, v, w, y.*

Let *g* be always hard, as in *gate*.

*j*, always soft, as *g* in *gentle*, *join*.

*s*, always as in *house*.

*z*, always as in *amaze*, *rose*.

*h* always have its distinct sound, as in *hothouse*,  
*grasshopper*, &c.

The usual sounds of *c, q, x* (English) may be represented by *k, kw, ks*.

17. If it be necessary to provide for the sounds *ch, sh, th*, in which *h* has not its distinct sound:—for the first sound *c* may be used, as it has been rejected from the alphabet in its usual sound; for *sh* write *ʃ*; for *th*, as in *thin*, write *t̃*; for *th*, as in *thine*, write *d̃*: in the one case the sound is dental, in the other palatine.

18. It is advisable, for the present, to represent *compound consonantal sounds* by a combination of consonants, rather than by any diacritical marks, or by new letters. The nasal sound of *n* may be expressed by *ng*. A sound is very common in many languages represented by *gb, kp*, &c. Such combinations appear clumsy, but we are not yet sufficiently acquainted with the varieties of African sounds, or with the construction of African words, to warrant a simpler notation.

19. The retention of these, and of other inconvenient combinations, will not stand in the way of the future adoption of any improved system of orthography. It will mani-

festly be a step gained toward such ultimate improvement, if all the present varied and varying systems can be referred to one common standard, and if a general understanding be introduced among the different Societies, and among other parties engaged in African translations.



## NOTICE.

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THESE Rules have received the revisal and sanction of the Rev. S. LEE, D.D., &c. &c., late Professor of Arabic and of Hebrew, in the University of Cambridge.

They have been further approved of and adopted by a Philological Committee, consisting of the Secretaries and other Members of the several Missionary Societies in England engaged in the translation of African languages.

The Editor will be happy to receive or to furnish any further information upon the subject ; which has an important bearing upon the great work of evangelizing the Continent of Africa.

HENRY VENN.

CHURCH MISSIONARY HOUSE,  
*Oct.* 1848.

NOTICE

These Rules have received the assent and sanction of the  
Hon. Secy, I.D. No. 10, 1895, and of the Hon. Secy of Public and  
Education in the University of Cambridge.  
They have been further approved and adopted by a  
Liturgical Committee, consisting of the Rector and  
other members of the several Collegiate Churches in  
England engaged in the revision of the Liturgy.  
The Editor will be happy to receive or to furnish any  
further information upon the subject, which he can supply  
and bearing upon the work of revising the

Continued of 1/10